

9th Meeting of the Standing Panel on Monitoring and Evaluation (SPME)

ICRAF, Nairobi: 27 March, 2008

Proceedings and some follow up actions.

Present:

Ken Fischer, SPME Chair

Members:

Paul Vlek

Osvaldo Feinstein

Sirkka Immonen, SPME Secretary

The SPME meeting comprised of a session open to observers and closed sessions for internal SPME discussion. The following persons attended parts of the meeting as observers: Rudy Rabbinge (SC Chair), Tony Simmons (World Agroforestry), Manny Lantin (CGIAR Secretariat), Gebisa Ejeta (SC), Mariza Barbosa (SC) and Jeff Waage (CGIAR External Review Panel).

Item 1: Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair, Ken Fischer, welcomed all to the SPME meeting and thanked SPME members for their contributions since the previous meeting. The Chair emphasised the need to continuously make even seemingly routine processes better. Monitoring and Evaluation involves Centers and therefore the observers' comments are welcome. The Chair explained the reasons for discussing some items in the agenda in closed session; particularly that the item on Performance Measurement (Item 7) involved discussions of individual Centers' PM submissions.

Item 2: Review and Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda was adopted with no changes.

Item 3: Minutes and Follow up Action from last SPME Meeting

The Chair invited SPME Secretary to give an update on SPME activities since the 8th meeting reporting briefly on activities that had been completed. With respect to the SC follow-up to the SWEPS meta-study, Manny Lantin noted that a comment paper would accompany the SC's document submitted to ExCo 14 from the Alliance. Pending activities were dealt with under the respective agenda items of this 9th meeting.

Item 4: SPME strategy and Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy for the CGIAR System

a. SPME strategy

The Chair introduced the draft SPME strategy and the purpose of the document. Its intention was to make clear what SPME does to facilitate the SC's work on monitoring and evaluation.

The SC Chair commented that while it is important for the Panels to clearly articulate their roles, there was no need for a separate “strategy” for the Standing Panels. The paper needs to be re-titled “the roles of the SPME in the Science Council”. Such a paper serves a very useful function in clarifying SPME’s duties and contribution to the SC’s work. There is also a need to clarify the SPME Standing Panel members’ duties as they contribute to SPME’s role within the SC and to their role in the SC at large.

Action:

- Rename the document “The role of SPME within the Science Council” and edit within this title.
- Add clarity about the expectations of the standing panel members (of SPME) with respect to SPME and the SC
- The final document will be shared with all SC members for their information.

b. Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy for CGIAR System and action plan for the M&E strategy

The draft paper “Monitoring and evaluation Strategy for the CGIAR system” was presented by Osvaldo Feinstein and discussed by the panel. At its heart is the improvement of the CGIAR M&E system in order to:

- be useful for accountability, showing the way in which resources are used and the results achieved
- facilitate learning, drawing lessons from experience and enabling Centers to share their knowledge on successes and failures, promoting the use of promising practices
- be independent, which is critical to ensure its credibility and use, combining self-assessment by the Centers (following SC guidance) with independent evaluation that validates and uses self-assessments as inputs
- be integrated, i.e., its components should fit together as a system

Currently the M&E is not fully integrated; the Alliance in particular is concerned of the transaction costs caused by multiple requirements in terms of reporting. A strategy will help streamline the M&E arrangements. The work begins from analysing the current systems constraints and opportunities. There is currently an enabling environment to harmonize the donors’ activities. Osvaldo Feinstein presented seven key action items to improve the overall M&E strategy. The meeting discussed each of these.

Key strategic items:

- i) *Developing an awareness of the risks due to a misuse of the M&E system.*
- ii) *Shifting partly SC’s oversight role from the MTPs to Strategic Plans. The SC’s attention on Center Strategic Plans will help link the Centers’ work with the System*
- iii) *Identification and sharing promising practices for the CGIAR System. For example EPMR results can become inputs to meta-studies.*

Other strategic items:

- iv) *Counting what counts. Things that are important should be measured. For example, there is criticism that the PMS does not take capacity building into consideration.*
- v) *Pilot trial a significant involvement of donors/investors in EPMRs, with the intention of reducing burden on Centers caused by different evaluations. The idea would be to develop a cooperative approach through pilot trials.*

- vi) *Developing a rating system to be applied by the EPMR teams* would help assess progress made in Centers and to compare Centers. Eventually a rating system can be applied through self-evaluation process that is validated.
- vii) *Periodic assessment of the CGIAR M&E system.*

The SC Chair emphasised the importance of the first two items in particular; enhancement of proper use of M&E information and the SC's role in giving strategic advice particularly on the alignment of Center strategies at the Systems level. SPME sought to fast track their implementation and asked Osvaldo to revise the action plan and time table accordingly. SPME endorsed the seven- point action plan and decided to focus on the top priority tasks:

- i) Developing an awareness of the risks due to a misuse of the M&E system (with a focus on the PMS indicators)
- ii) Shifting partly SC's oversight role from MTPs to Strategic Plans/ Strategies
- iii) Identification and sharing promising practices from EPMRS for the CGIAR system

Action:

- Draft Guidelines for moving SC oversight role from MTPs to Strategic plan developed.
- Revise the draft note on “risk mitigation” and begin developing clear guidelines on use of the PMS indicators for results.
- SC to hold a Workshop with CGIAR donors before the end of 2008 to clarify issues, risks, and ways to deal with them. In addition donor involvement in EPMRs could be discussed (see below)
- Identification and sharing promising practices for the CGIAR system EPMR teams to include in their report a section on practices that could be considered as “best” or “good” or “promising” for the CGIAR system. This can be implemented immediately and trialled with the forthcoming EPMRs.
- In addition, SPME may proceed with a synthesis of a few “nuggets” from recent EPMRs to be disseminated electronically and in published briefs. This would require the following steps:
 - SPME agreeing on two “nuggets” (some examples were presented at SC09) from recent EPMRs.
 - Prepare DRAFT brief to be discussed at SPME 10.

The other items of the action plan were discussed in varying levels of detail. Action items were decided for each item.

iv) Counting what counts:

Action:

- Identify a minimum set of core data and insert into the TORs of EPMRs so as to facilitate meta-studies and comparisons across Centers. This can be trialled with the EPMRs in 2008.
- Undertake information needs assessment which may be convenient to contract out, if resources are available for this purpose.

v) Involving donors/investors in EPMRs/ CGIAR M&E System.

A draft proposal was presented at the meeting. The concept was fully endorsed. The SC already invites donors to contribute to the EPMRs but it was considered that a more strategic

approach would be necessary. A practical proposal would be to pilot one or two joint multi-donor EPMRs in 2009-2010. This would require informing donors about the up coming EPMR schedule with a 2 year planning frame and seeing how any planned reviews by a donor can be built into the SC planning of the EPMR.

Action:

- The upcoming reviews of CIMMYT and IFPRI will be targeted. A “letter of interest” will be developed for the SC Chair to send to the Centers to forward to their main donors. Donors could be asked to identify specific areas of activity that they are interested in and to suggest review candidates. Donors should be informed about forthcoming EPMRs much earlier than is currently done.

vi) Developing a rating system to be applied by the EPMR teams

There is an opportunity to make better use of the EPMR for a more uniform across the board performance assessment. This could compliment the annual PM system. One way is to develop a core set of performance data (as discussed above) to be appraised by EPMR panels. SPME will examine the utility of a core set of performance metrics and a trialling of the “rating” by EPMR panels.

Action:

- A working concept will be developed for SPME10

vii) Periodic assessment of the CGIAR M&E system

The SC should routinely undertake a peer review of the M&E system that it implements. This could be done prior to a “system review”. The 5- year system review will present it findings at AGM08. That review will have recommendations about the M&E processes. The SC will respond to those recommendations and make appropriate changes.

Item 5 Improving External Program and Management Review (EPMR) process

The meeting tabled information about the EMR process from:

- Inputs from Meta-evaluation study in 2008
- Feed-back from EPMR Panels, Chair and Centers
- Ideas from best-practices in evaluation

These papers were analysed to explore ways of improving the EPMR process. Some of the ideas that evolved from that discussion:

a) There is need to request pre-prepared documentation from the Centers and standardize certain metrics and analyses that the Center would provide. This would help the Panels—that currently may get overwhelmed by a load of un-annotated material—and also facilitate comparisons across EPMRs and future meta-analyses. Equally important, it would reduce the workload on the Center in preparation for the review allowing them to focus only those documents of high relevance.

Action: under Item 4b, “Counting what counts”

b) Revise the Guidelines and Terms of Reference for EPMRs to ensure they focus on the keep strategic issues. Add in to the guidelines good evaluation practices, which can be drawn from external sources (e.g. a review article by ODI, a recent review of the ASB System wide program and other useful sources). The aim should be that the TOR leads the teams to produce some minimum common responses to a core set of indicators than can be benchmarked.

Action:

- As a pilot, a core set of evaluation data¹ (as discussed earlier) will be requested from Centers in preparation for the EPMRs forthcoming in 2008-2009.
- Based on the pilot experience the Guidelines will be updated for SPME11
- Also proposed is a common approach to evaluate the M&E functions by the EPMRs again for use as a pilot in the upcoming EPMRs in 2008²

c) Assessment of partnerships should be handled in a more systematic way in the EPMRs, including i) relevance, ii) efficacy, iii) efficiency (with particular attention paid to transaction costs) and iv) exit strategy. Pre-prepared material—a “map of partnerships”—is needed also as a basis for Panel-partner interaction. Once the EPMR is finished providing feed-back to partners and stakeholders should be a standard step in the process. SPME and SC in general have not developed a clear guideline on how partners should be assessed for their contribution to outputs and outcomes.

Action:

- Pending on funds availability, SPME will consider commissioning an experts paper that would give guidance for this purpose. A DRAFT TOR to be developed for SC 10.

d) The use of CCERs in the M&E of the system.

In 2002, the SC sought to streamline the overall M&E process by making more direct use of the CCERs to the EPMRs (with an objective that where appropriate subject matters covered by the CCERs need not be covered by the EPMR). Despite this intention to make the CCERs into a standard building block for the EPMR, the EPMR Panels have continuously observed the CCERs to be of variable quality and utility. Secondly, the SC has observed that some Centers undertake a large number of CCERs just before an EPMR which must contribute the “review overload” of the staff.

SPME recommends that CCERs would be considered as an important internal tool that Boards should use for their purposes. The CCER role should be one to help Centers to review and benchmark certain programs or competencies within a Center through peer review. In general these reviews are meant to inform and advice the Center management in terms of relevance and quality of a program in order to offer strategic direction and guide personnel and financial resourcing of the program.

The CCER should not be considered a substitute for part of the EPMR process even though their content may inform the EPMR process. They should be assessed by the EPMR in terms of their effectiveness as a research management tool, reviewing their planning, timeliness and

¹ It is important to leave the Panel Chair space to address Center specific issues where Centers differ and which are deemed to warrant differential attention

² SPIA should be involved in discussing to what is expected and measured for impact (the feasibility of showing *ex post* impacts on poverty alleviation and other CGIAR’s ultimate goals is more difficult for some areas of research than others);

quality. Eventually, when the EPMR is satisfied with the quality of (some of) the CCERs, it could use them as one of the multiple sources of evidence.

Action:

- SPME will amend the M&E Policy document by SPME10.

e) The Panel structure.

Currently small teams of 4-5 persons carry out the entire EPMR. The meeting discussed the view that time commitment needed may limit the chances of getting good people for the panel. Furthermore, a small team may not sufficiently represent the areas of expertise needed to address the various aspects of Center research and operations. It is also difficult to include in a small team the regional, gender and expertise balance expected from EPMR teams. An alternative is a “flatter team” structure with a larger number of panel members with more limited duties (in contrast to the current panel of small teams where a 4-5 persons carry out the entire evaluation). The flatter team would involve a large number of contracts and poses more demand on the Chair to deliver a uniform Panel report, but being able to complete the task in a shorter time could enhance objectivity. An assumption is for a similar cost for the review.

Action:

- A paper detailing the advantages and disadvantages of changes in Panel structure to be discussed at SPME10.
- SPME expose this concept to EPMR Panel Chairs for their feed back before advancing any pilot.

f) Scheduling of EPMRs

SPME agreed that there should be no major adjustments to the EPMR schedules following Centers wishes, but EPMRs should be organized regularly every 5 years.

Item 6 On-going and planned review

a. Update on scheduled EPMRs

SPME Secretary provided an update on on-going and planned EPMRs. The meeting noted that there is need to design the schedule so that the review burden of 2007 will not be repeated in 5 years' time. The meeting also heard that there are now two times (two ExCo meetings) in the year at which an EPMR can be concluded.

The ongoing difficulty to appoint the best panel and panel members was also discussed, particularly in light of the time commitment of busy people addressed earlier above. One way is to start the EPMR process earlier.

Action:

- To prepare a 5- year rolling EPMR plan with adjustments to “spread” the reviews more evenly around the potential bump in 2012. Donors and Centers will be advised of the schedule
- EPMR process to begin earlier than is currently the practice. The SC task force to be appointed 15-18 months in advance; Donors to be advised of the review 18 months in

advance and seek opportunities for mutual use of the review and the Panel Chair to be appointed no later than 12 months out from the review.

- This schedule will apply to the EPMRs of CIMMYT and IFPRI in 2010.

b. Social Science Stripe Review

SPME Secretary provided an update on the First phase of the stripe Review. The Chair, Chris Barrett has been appointed and data/information collection from Centers has started. The Phase 1 is to be completed by SC10. The key issues for the review to address are the quality of social sciences at the Centers and whether the Centers are engaged in the most relevant social science activities.

Item 7 Performance Measurement

The SC Chair emphasised that there is need to develop the PM system towards better balance among the components. The SC needs to be fully involved in and committed to this task. There is need to continue the debate with Centers on whether the System is doing the performance measurement in the right way. Centers' motivation and ownership is important. The individual PM components need to be relevant and credible. The SC members' involvement in the assessments of certain results components is important for spreading the load, for involving the SC members in a primary task and also for stimulating their attention on the real research activities. The SC Chair also drew a parallel to the MTP process where the Plans have changed from having been a liability to being an asset. We should aim at the same with the annual PM exercise.

In this context SPME discussed the following issues related to the PM Indicators.

a. Proposed changes to the PM measure of outputs

At SC08 and based on the feed back presented at the PM workshop in August 2007, SPME made the argument that rewarding Centers for full achievement of the output targets had the risk of leading to the downsizing of targets in order to maximise success (i.e. perverse incentive) and recommended that the indicator based on output target achievement be removed for the PM System.

This decision was again reviewed and upheld. SPME view is that output target monitoring is best done internally by the Centers and as part of the MTP process. SPME has worked with the Centers to incorporate this ability to monitor the output targets in the new online MTP instrument. SPME's approach has been to a) improve the MTP as a basis for setting relevant outputs and output targets (that are available in a public document in the internet in the CGMap database) and b) hold the Centers responsible for monitoring achievement and making that performance public also in the CGMap. SPME discussed means to ensure that the Center and Boards take more responsibility for the self monitoring of output targets perhaps through a more uniform EPMR assessment of the M&E process.

SPME discussed the need to fill the gap in measuring outputs by suitable proxy indicators, such as the publications indicators, which is the recognised norm for all scientific institutes and is straight forward, and a capacity building indicator, for which a concept note with some background analysis was discussed.

Action:

- Following recommendation from the SC in 2007 and the subsequent discussions at ExCo13 and AGM07, SPME will draft a paper about strengthening the research related indicators in the PM System, including dealing with outputs.
- Explore ways to reinforce the roles of Boards in monitoring output targets – see discussion above.

b. PM results in 2008 - outcomes

SPME designed new criteria for evaluation of outcomes. The draft criteria were shared with the ADE for comments. The criteria for assessment are posted on the SPME web site. SPME members (in closed session) assessed the outcomes from two Centers in order to calibrate the procedures.

From this SPME developed some internal guidelines to assist the outcome reviewers in their assessment. A schedule to engage appropriate SC members in the outcome assessment was developed. The SC's scores need to be submitted in the online system by the end of April.

Action

- SPME to facilitate the assessment of outcomes for 2008 by SC members
- SPME will coordinate SC input to the PMS assessment in 2008 and lessons learnt from it.

c. Further Modifications to the PM System

The Panel discussed how to test a new indicator for publication quality based on journal impact factors. The testing will be done on the indicator 4B submissions that include only articles published in journals that are in the Thomson Scientific database.

Action:

- Further develop the publications indicators involving testing a new indicator for publishing in top journals. A proposal for calculating the indicator results will be circulated among SPME within a few months
- Request through the ADE's their engagement in the process of developing a capacity indicator.

d. Joint SPME/SPIA session on the PM system and follow up from the August 2007 PM Workshop

The discussion focused specifically on the common areas and experiences in the assessment of Outcome and Impact submissions in the PM System. In the outcomes assessment, an element of peer-review has been introduced to look at the importance of the outcomes and their IPG nature. SPME has sought to identify as objective criteria as possible to assess these aspects in the Outcome submissions, however acknowledging that evaluation of science has a subjective peer-review component that can be the SC members' responsibility. Although SPIA does not assess the content and value of impacts, the multiple criteria it uses for scoring Impact indicator 3A submissions take into consideration issues such as distance from delivery and the difference between research areas in terms of difficulty of measuring and demonstrating *ex post* impact.

In summary SPME and SPIA are now using more similar approaches in assessing these two indicators.

The meeting also discussed the focus of each indicator in the pathway. It was considered that although adoption and influence are looked at in both the Outcome and Impact indicators, there is no duplication because the indicators measure quite different things. While attribution and significance are challenges in demonstrating and assessing outcome and impact cases, attribution is easier to show in outcomes, but significance can be better assessed at the impact stage.

The SC Chair recommended that the outcome assessment should not involve assessment of significance but that should be evaluated at the impact stage. The outcomes therefore will be evaluated for their relevance to allow differentiation between minor outcomes and important outcomes. *This is now being done (subjectively) in the new criteria for outcomes.*

SPIA is changing its scoring of 3A to 3-year moving average to buffer against annual shocks. This is a good model to be used also with Outcomes, and possibly with other indicators, such as publications. SPIA is already using benchmarks in the Impact indicator and SPME will also consider adjusting the number of outcome cases a Center needs to report each year to match with the size of the Center.

As an urgent matter, the standing Panels agreed to jointly prepare guidance for donors regarding potential misuse of the PM indicator information. The Panels also agreed to prepare feed-back to Centers on this year's results, as has been done in previous years.

Action (joint by SPME and SPIA)

- SPIA and SPME will prepare a joint note of guidance to donors about the misuse of indicator information for presentation at SC 10.
- SPME will adjust the requirement of outcome submission to match with Center size.
- Moving to 3-year simple rolling averages will be considered for all research related indicators.

e. Development of a PM System for CPs

SPME discussed the utility of an annual PM system for the Challenge Programs (CP) and the rationale of applying a PM System also for the CPs. It concluded that it would not be appropriate for the following reasons: the CPs go through a rather rigorous selection process, they use competitive mechanisms for project initiation (involving peer reviews); they are time bound and involved longer term funding commitment than is characteristic to Centers, they have a Mid-Term review at a critical stage when it is possible to assess progress, and they go through a rather rapid evolution where both progress and success indicators are needed at different stages of development.

This said, SPME strongly endorsed the recommendation in one of the CPERs to enhance the progress indicators (which change as the Program evolves) and success indicators. Further SPME recommended that the Program governance body monitor these important internal indicators - with oversight from ExCo (Annual report) and SC (MTP).

The mid-term review (CPER) is an effective way to externally check that the progress is as expected and timelines are likely to be met, or recommend measure for correcting the CP's course.

Action:

- SPME will make recommendations regarding PMS for CPs and prepare written justification for ExCo.
- SC to inform the CP Governing Bodies of the importance of setting and monitoring the annual performance indicators.

Item 8 Medium-Term Plans

The meeting noted the marked improvement in the MTPs over the last five years and particularly welcomed the increasing ownership of them as a useful internal monitoring instrument as well as serving their external function. SPME particularly thanked the ADE for working with the ICT-KM and SC in developing an online system that not only improves the efficiency of the preparation of the MTP but also the utility. It also has incorporated the monitoring of the output targets discussed earlier.

This improvement in MTPs as the basis for responsible monitoring of performance has led the SC towards a periodic (every three year) thorough assessment of some of MTPs (those of high standard) with a “needs to“ commentary on an annual basis. SPME discussed how to undertake the “needs to “ assessment for the six MTPs for 2008. With all MTPs there is need to assess their program alignment with the Priorities.

The majority of Center and CP MTPs, however, will be reviewed in detail in 2008. SPME will coordinate the process including allocation of tasks among SC members. SPME expects that the MTPs will now better conform to the format as most of them will be submitted on-line through EasyMTP. The MTPs need to be explicit about the contents included in the MTP guidelines. SPME will re-examine the internal instructions for reviewers of the MTPs that link the assessment criteria to the guidelines. The assessment format should be simplified. The discussion of the MTPs at SC10 should focus on system-level issues and highlights.

Action:

- SPME will revise the instructions for SC to review Center and CP MTPs in 2008.
- SPME will coordinate the SC assessment of the MTPs.
- SPME will coordinate the formal discussions of the MTPs at SC10.

Item 9: Other business

There was no other business.